

Field Notes

Leg I of the winter survey was cut short due to a hard hang on the bottom during rough weather, which damaged our winches and forced us to return to Woods Hole for repairs. We did not cover the normal number of stations on this leg that would give us a better perspective on fish abundance and distribution. We did note that spiny dogfish like last year, seemed widely dispersed from very shallow to our deepest strata. It seems as though years ago, we could get into and out of the dogs, although I remember much bigger tows on a more regular basis. Today it seems as though there are less caught per tow, but the resource appears to be more widely distributed.

Due to the shortened Leg I, the mission for Leg II was to sample within a much larger area than normal. The area covered was from Chesapeake Bay north to western Georges Bank. This was accomplished by reducing the sampling density per stratum.

The largest catch of summer flounder was at station 95 (11-1) where 195 fluke were caught ranging in size from 11 to 30 inches.

At Station 60 (67-2), there was a most unusual catch. There were 2,180 striped searobins weighing in at 1,479 pounds and 797 northern searobins weighing in at 179 pounds.

Every once in a while there is a catch that demonstrates how diverse and bountiful our oceans can be. We had such a tow at station 76 (2-8). There were 21 species and 10,436 fish. The species with at least double-digit counts were:

Alewife – 169	Goosefish - 52
American shad – 30	Little skate - 306
Atlantic herring - 3,473	Mackerel - 5,899
Blueback herring – 122	Scallop - 42
Butterfish – 31	Spiny dogfish - 226
Four spot flounder - 44	

The other species in the catch were *Cancer borealis* and *Cancer irroratus* crabs, fluke, American lobster, Loligo squid, ocean pout, red hake, silver hake, spotted hake and witch flounder.

As noted last year, the larger spiny dogfish catches occurred along or beyond the 50-fathom line. The largest catch was at station 34 (63-3) numbering 3,194 and weighing 14,926 pounds. The greatest concentration was found around the Norfolk Canyon, where at four stations (61 (67-3), 62 (67-1), 63 (66-3), and 64 (68-1)) 8,099 spiny dogfish were caught weighing 22,118 pounds. Spiny dogfish comprised 66% of the entire (unstratified) biomass in the survey.

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